

**Jeopardy Assessment**  
for the Proposed Incidental Taking Authorization  
of the Blanding's Turtle

**American Transmission Company**  
**PADDOCK-ROCKDALE 345kV TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT**  
**Dane and Rock Counties, Wisconsin**

**Background**

In Wisconsin, Blanding's turtles have been listed as a threatened species since 1979. They were listed for several reasons including a very long maturation period (17-20 years), increased road mortality of adults--especially females, little evidence of successful recruitment, significant wetland habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. Blanding's turtles live throughout the state with the exception of the extreme north-central counties. They are most concentrated in the vast marshes along the Wisconsin River in Wood, Juneau, Adams, and Iowa Counties and along the Mississippi River. Blanding's turtles live primarily in marshes and shallow, vegetated bays of lakes, but can be found in almost any aquatic habitat including ponds, slow-moving rivers, trout streams and some northern bogs. They are semi-aquatic turtles and are known to move about regularly during the summer between various aquatic habitats and occasionally spend periods of time on land away from water. Blanding's turtles often overwinter in moving or deeper water to avoid freezing in winter. They are generally active from March to early November and breed in early spring and fall. Nesting usually begins in late May and runs through June. Females prefer to nest in well-drained sun-lit sandy soils in both natural and disturbed areas and are known to travel up to 1.5 miles from water to find suitable upland nesting sites. They typically return to the same nesting area each year.

**Jeopardy Assessment**

The Paddock-Rockdale Transmission Line Project is a new line that will be constructed through several wetlands that support suitable habitat for the state-threatened Blanding's turtle. American Transmission Company LLC and ATC Management Inc (collectively ATC) is constructing approximately 35 miles of new 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line generally located on existing right-of-way (ROW) from the existing Paddock Substation to the existing Rockdale Substation in Rock and Dane Counties and associated facilities (Project). The Project will utilize a combination of double-circuit and triple-circuit new steel monopole and existing lattice transmission structures. In order to operate equipment in the wetlands and to minimize disturbance to these sensitive habitats, construction matting will be placed prior to construction of the line's transmission towers. The placement of the mats and the construction of the transmission line towers pose a potential risk of take of the turtles. The following conditions will be employed to help avoid or minimize the taking of the turtle if/when this authorization is issued. The conditions will apply to wetlands 29-W1 and 30-W1, identified as suitable turtle habitat.

**Conditions of the Authorization**

**Mat placement and timing:**

Mat placement shall occur during the summer (August through Sept 15) when Blanding's turtles are least active because of the heat and generally drier conditions. If placement cannot be completed by mid-September, ATC will be required to work with the department to determine if additional conditions will be required.

**Turtle removals:**

The wetland corridor sections that supports suitable Blanding's habitat will be surveyed during the course of placing the construction mats in order to locate and move any turtles encountered. Each of the transmission line tower locations in suitable Blanding's habitat will be fenced using trenched-in silt fencing prior to any construction activities within these areas and these areas will also be surveyed to conduct turtle removals. Surveys will involve visual reconnaissance by a qualified herpetologist familiar with the species and its natural history. All turtles encountered will be moved out of the construction corridor and placed in adjacent suitable habitat. Once turtles have been moved and the construction mats are in place, future risk to the turtles is expected to be negligible.

If the above condition is employed as required by the pending authorization, the Department believes that the risk of take will be very minimal for this project. As such, it has determined that the proposed project will not jeopardize the continued existence or recovery of the state population of Blanding's turtles or the whole plant-animal community of which they are a part.